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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 001079

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2018  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [EFIN](#) [EAID](#) [HO](#)  
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON HONDURAN PRIMARY ELECTION RESULTS

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 01073  
[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 1072

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, Reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Preliminary results confirm that Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo won in a landslide in the National Party primary election and Vice President Elvin Santos' stand-in Mauricio Villeda won a decisive victory over President of the Congress Roberto Micheletti in the Liberal Party primary election, as reported reftel A. The preliminary count has concluded and efforts have now switched to the official count, which will take some days to conclude. Reports continue to indicate that these were the cleanest elections in Honduran history. Santos now has to deal with his court case challenging his right to win. The fact that the Nationalist Party garnered more total votes than the Liberal Party for the first time ever indicates dissatisfaction with the latter, an advantage for Lobo as he enters the campaign for the general election, to be held in November 2009. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Honduras' Rapid Transmission of Election Results (TREP), which involves "real time" cell phone calls from the individual elections tables to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) with the results for the presidential races, closed Monday morning with almost 70 percent of voting centers reporting, enough to show clear winners in both parties from the November 30 primaries. The TSE has now turned to the official count, which also includes the Congressional and municipal elections. Results are not expected until the end of the week.

[1](#)3. (U) OAS and local observers continue to report that these primary elections went extremely well on a technical level. As reported reftel A, they appear to have been the most transparent elections in Honduran history. The Embassy was thoroughly involved in supporting the democratic process through technical support throughout the year to the National Register of Persons (which issues the voter credentials) and the TSE. The rules established by the TSE in conjunction with the parties made for a transparent process and included the first-time use of transparent ballot boxes, the TREP quick transmission mechanism, voting at the tables that was open to the public, and election registration lists at the tables that had the photograph of the individual voters to match with their national ID cards. Credit is also due to the Honduran military, which plays a key role in this process, guarding election material, delivering it to the polling centers, providing security at the polls, and then returning official results and all ballots to the TSE. Over 13,000

police and 14,000 soldiers provided security for the elections. This is not to say that there were not any problems; OAS observers, including Embassy representatives, indicated that there were some logistical issues at the 5,306 voting centers. Nevertheless, public statements by the OAS observer mission and domestic observer groups, as well as by the winners and losers in the presidential races, are clear in validating the results.

¶4. (U) As of the Monday, approximately 1.15 million Honduran votes had been tallied in the TREP. In total, approximately 1.5 million Hondurans (35 percent of those eligible) are expected to have voted in the primary elections, slightly less than the last primary in 2005. For the first time in recent history the National Party is expected to outpoll the Liberal party (by at least 100,000 votes). Despite Lobo,s competitors never mounting much of a battle, the TREP showed him receiving 399,788 votes (76 percent), which was more than those of the top two Liberal Party candidates combined. Lobo,s closest competition came from Mario Canahuati who received 102,191 votes (20 percent). For the Liberal Party, the Santos/Villeda ticket won convincingly with 227,723 votes (52 percent) versus the Micheletti ticket who received 22,746 (28 percent) of the Liberal votes cast.

¶5. (U) Questions remain regarding what will transpire within the Liberal Party. Santos indicated that, in due time, he will continue to pursue his Supreme Court case and eventually the Presidential candidacy instead of Villeda. Santos also stated, &I will fight for my registration (with the TSE), (and) we will fix the unity of the Liberal Party.8 While late Sunday evening Micheletti conceded defeat surrounded by his principal supporters in a press conference, no one expects him or President Manuel &Mel8 Zelaya to jump to support Santos, given the history of antagonism between the three. When conceding defeat, Micheletti stated, &We accept the people,s decision and will support and accompany the electoral process in the coming year,s general elections." When questioned by the press if he was impressed by the unity showed by the Elvin Santos movement, Micheletti tersely replied, &The name of the candidate of the Liberal Party is Mauricio Villeda Bermudez.8

¶6. (C) The Ambassador called all of the presidential candidates to congratulate them either for their victory or for their magnanimity in defeat. Santos and Lobo were clearly basking in their victory with the former already working party elders to seek support for appealing to the Supreme Court to overturn his election ban. Micheletti, who has avoided the public eye since the election, told the Ambassador that he would support Villeda, not Santos, as the party's choice, but hinted that could change if Santos successfully unified the party behind him.

¶7. (C) Comment: The elections were a clear success and an important step to moving beyond the Zelaya administration. The next step is straightening out Santos' constitutional issues. Santos was forbidden to run by the TSE based on their constitutional interpretation that vice-presidents cannot run for president and therefore had Villeda step in for him. Santos' next move is to appeal to the Supreme Court; he has some good constitutional arguments on his side. Should the court rule in his favor, Villeda would then step aside for Santos. The court decision, however, will be influenced by political factors. It will now be more difficult for the court to ignore the popular will, but Santos will need to acquire the support of Liberal Party leaders to pressure the court to support him. He seems to have taken the right steps to do so, with even President Zelaya and Liberal Party President Patricia suggesting that they might support him. Micheletti is still holding out, but his influence is weakened following his overwhelming defeat. Santos will have to demonstrate the political acumen to bring him around. Despite pre-election accusations that he would cheat to win, Micheletti clearly did not and acted honorably in quickly admitting defeat.

¶8. (C) Honduras now has an entire year until the general

election. The resolution, one way or the other, of the constitutional issues involving Santos will further clarify the political picture. We are confident that U.S. interests and equities can be preserved with Pepe Lobo, Elvin Santos or Mauricio Villeda. At this early point, Lobo is clearly the favorite. Santos/Villeda will be hurt by popular disenchantment with President Zelaya and the Liberal Party. Zelaya has high negatives for a number of reasons, chiefly his governance style of jumping from crisis to crisis, his joining of ALBA, and the deteriorating security situation. While Santos has not been close to Zelaya, he is his Vice-President and much of what Zelaya had done has tarred the Liberals. A sign of this was the turnout. While lower than the last primaries, it was the first primary in which more voters turned out for the Nationalists than the Liberals. In fact, all of the decrease in turnout appears to have come from the Liberal side. End Comment.

LLORENS